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**ACPL ITEM
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IN AUNT MAHALY'S CABIN

*A NEGRO MELODRAMA IN
ONE ACT*

BY
PAUL GREEN

*Author of "The Man Who Died at Twelve
O'Clock," "The No 'Count Boy," etc.*

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NEW YORK
SAMUEL FRENCH
PUBLISHER
25 WEST 45TH STREET

LONDON
SAMUEL FRENCH, LTD.
26 SOUTHAMPTON STREET
STRAND

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

1947
BLUE-GUM ED }
BOLL-WEEVIL } *Two Negro murderers*
2 AUNT MAHALY, *an old witch-woman from beyond*
the grave.
1948
THE BLACK DOG }
THE LITTLE GIRL } *Goblins of the*
JACK-MUH-LANTERN } *swamp who do*
THE IRON-FACED MAN } *Aunt Mahaly's*
RAW-HEAD-AND-BLOODY-BONES } *bidding*
THE MOONACK }
THE GHOST of a MURDERED MAN.

SCENE: *In AUNT MAHALY's cabin in a deep swamp
on the Cape Fear River in eastern North Caro-
lina.*

TIME: *The present.*

French 696

IN AUNT MAHALY'S CABIN

AUNT MAHALY'S deserted one-room cabin in a deep cypress swamp late one August afternoon. In the center back is a heavy door partly swung open, letting in the sickly bluish light of gathering dusk. High up in the left wall, cut through the heavy logs, is a small opening serving for a window. A wooden shutter made of one width of plank swings from it. Through this window a sort of funnel-shaped column of light comes down, meeting the light from the door near the center of the room, and revealing an old black rusty wash-pot. Brambles and all sorts of puny creepers have grown up through the clay floor, some raising themselves up and falling back in great bows, others clasping the walls with their damp frail hands and running up into the rafters, sticking their heads out towards the window and the door and bending back to hang down in the room like long thin reptiles. A tall clump of willows and jimson weeds has grown up near the right front. As the eye grows accustomed to the gloom, it discovers a sort of low bed in the right rear, partly overgrown with briars and tall large-leaved reeds. Here and there on the floor are broken boards, a box or two, an old chair and, near the center front, a small pile of dry firewood. Fur-

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ther gazing into the thickening shadows reveals an old dress and strings of dried herbs hanging on the left rear wall, and above the door a wide-spreading pair of cowhorns. The sough of the wind in the cypress trees outside moans and whispers, mingled with the long cool notes of calling swamp thrushes. As the dusk grows deeper and deeper, an owl begins hooting far off, and another screams out his ear-splitting reply close by the haunted cabin.

The thump of running footsteps draws near. It stops, and then two low hushed voices are heard. After a moment a tall muscular Negro of twenty-five or thirty, wearing a cap, with torn clothes, peers in through the door. Panting hard, he beckons to someone behind him. Another Negro, short and stocky, about forty, his clothes in shreds, staggers forward into the light. He carries a small satchel.

FIRST NEGRO. (*Almost in a whisper*) Le's lay low heah, till it's good an' dark. (*He steps into the room.*)

SECOND NEGRO. (*Hesitating, and catching his breath*) I—I believe I' druther stick in de swamp, Blue-gum. (*He mops his face with his sleeve.*) Lawd, I's run to deaf!

BLUE-GUM. Boll-Weevil, you is a damn fool. We'd be ketched sho' as thunder, I tells you. Dey'll look foh us everywhah but heah in dis ha'nted house. Come on in an' le's rest. You needs it, man.

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Slumping down on the sill*) I sho' do.

BLUE-GUM. (*In alarm*) Don' set dere in de light o' dat do'. Git funder in de room. (*BOLL-WEEVIL rises wearily and moves into the room.*) Gimme dat satchel. I'll take keer of it whiles you rest. (*He reaches out for it.*)

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Snatching it back and speaking in a hard voice*) Nunh-unh, no you don't, hoss-cake. I's on to you. Dis satchel stays in my hands till we's safe in Fayetteville.

BLUE-GUM. (*With a sudden fire in his eyes*) You damn runt, how come you so 'spicious! Didn't I do de killin'?

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Putting the satchel on the ground and sitting on it*) You stobbed de white man aw right, but I was de fust one to git claws on de dough, an' I's gwine hold to it till we gits away safe whah we kin split 'er up. I's gwine be sho' o' my ha'f.

BLUE-GUM. Why ain't I gut cause to 'spicion you den? How I know you ain' plannin' to skip wid de whole substance?

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Calmly*) You knows I ain't. I's stuck to you times befo', but I 'minds me o' one time you didn't stick to me. Unh-hunh—I's gut yo' number, baby.

BLUE-GUM. I done tol' you I had to run dat time. Dey was a-pushin' me clost.

BOLL-WEEVIL. Pushin' you clost! Well, how clost was dey pushin' o' me! Dat judge in Lilling-ton gi'n me th'ee yeah foh dat li'l scrap. An' den when I come out, you done spent all de jack, an' I ain't never seed a cent of it.

BLUE-GUM. (*Sullenly*) Aw right, have it yo' way, li'l man—des' so I gits my shur. (*He moves among the brambles. There is a sudden whirr of wings and scrambling among the vines in the rafters.*)

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Springing up*) Lawd in heaben, whut's dat!

BLUE-GUM. (*Hiding his fear and laughing quietly*) Hee—hee—you's a brave man to be in a murder, an' a li'l bird roostin' in a ol' house to skeah hell out o' you!

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*With a grunt of relief*) Oh, des' a bird! You needn't laugh. I bet it skeahd you.

BLUE-GUM. (*Lying down near the clump of willows*) Not yo's trully, Boll-Weevil. I was des' listenin' foh one to fly out. I knowed dey'd be roost-in' heah.

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Scornfully*) Thinks you's pow'ful smart, don't you? Allus prepared foh whut's gwine happen.

BLUE-GUM. Dat's me to a T. Takes mo'n dese heah Nawth Cahlina p'lice an' sher'ffs to ketch Blue-gum Ed. Ain't I been in mo' scrapes dan any nigger ever bawn in Hornett County, an' is I ever been ketched? Not onct.

BOLL-WEEVIL. Yeh, but you ain't never done murder befo'.

BLUE-GUM. (*With a sudden soberness*) Dat's so, I ain't. (*He falls to pondering, half to himself.*) God, how dat man rolled his eyes at me when I souse my knife in him!

BOLL-WEEVIL. Whut's dat?

BLUE-GUM. (*Suddenly shaking himself*) Nothin'. (*With conviction.*) But we's gut de stuff to pay foh it. A whole satchel full. Must be fo' or five thousand' in dere. Le's count an' see. (*He raises himself on his elbow.*)

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Standing up quickly*) Not yit, not yit. Wait till we's to Liza's place.

BLUE-GUM. You sho' is a stubborn fellow. (*He lies down again.*) Set down an' rest. I ain't gwine tech you. (BOLL-WEEVIL *sits down and finally stretches himself out with the satchel under his shoulder.*)

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Threateningly*) No, I reckon you ain't gwine tech me. You's already gut enough on you to send you to Raleigh to roost in dat big 'lectric cheer.

BLUE-GUM. You, too, nigger, don' you fo'git dat.

BOLL-WEEVIL. I didn't do de deed nohow.

BLUE-GUM. (*Laughing harshly*) Dat's aw right 'bout de killin'. When I goes, you goes.

BOLL-WEEVIL. Dey says when dey strops you in an' turns on de juice, dat yo' hair des' quiles up an' dey kin smell yo' flesh fryin'. I can't stand to think of it. Le's keep travelin'. (*He stands up.*)

BLUE-GUM. (*With forced bravado*) Listen at dat skunk whimper! Shet yo' jaw an' take it easy. We'll be movin' fo' de moon's riz.

BOLL-WEEVIL. But seems lak to me de longer we stays heah, de mo' time dey has to ketch us.

BLUE-GUM. (*Lowering his voice*) You's sharp, ain't you? Don' you know dat ten minutes adder de crime dem bank people was on to it an' de sher'ff had every road an' paf watched! Dat man made a hell of a racket de fust time I stobbed him, an' dey's boun' to git onto it quick. Whut chance we gut to git away till it's good an' dark?

BOLL-WEEVIL. But dey'll be all th'ough dis swamp adder us.

BLUE-GUM. Co'se dey will. (*Coolly*) But dey won't look foh us heah.

BOLL-WEEVIL. Won't? How come?

BLUE-GUM. You sho' is a fool. Ca'se dis is Aunt Mahaly's ha'nted house, an' dey ain't nobody come 'in a mile of it in twelve yeah. Dat's de very reason we come heah. Dey ain't a nigger would come down to dis place adder dark to save his soul from de devil.

BOLL-WEEVIL. De niggers is skeahd aw right, but dem white men—dey'll not mind comin' to dis place.

BLUE-GUM. Yeh, but dey'll already say to deir-selves—dey'll say lak dis: "Now every nigger in de country fights shy of dat ol' Mahaly House, and dese two will keep movin' on. Dey won't go dat way

th'ough de swamp." And whiles dey is scourin' de creeks, heah you an' me lies safe as ticks.

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Admiringly*) You's smart, I'll ha' to hand it to you.

BLUE-GUM. I ain't no fool lak some folks. An' I figger dat later on when dey cain't find us, some of 'em'll say to search dis house. By dat time you an' me'll be clean gone.

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*After a moment*) But de bloodhounds?

BLUE-GUM. Hain't you thought o' dem befo'? Look heah, nigger, when you'n me splits up our dough dis time, we ain't pardners no longer. You's des' too simple.

BOLL-WEEVIL. Why foh?

BLUE-GUM. Listen at him! He axes me why foh! You reckon I ain't figgered on de bloodhounds? Co'se I has. An' so I says I gut des' forty minutes in dis house. Dark den. Lak dis: Dey ain't gut no bloodhounds at Lillington. De nighest is at Fayetteville. In one mo' hour dey'll be heah. In forty minutes us'll be swimmin' down de creek, in fifty in de river, in sixty swum to de island and gut our boat. By two in de mawnin' we'll be sleepin' in Liza's cellar. Dere dat night, dat day an' de next—an' she out choppin' her beans an' milkin' de cows lak all times. Den from dere it's a cinch to make it Norf.

BOLL-WEEVIL. Lawd, you's de smartest nigger I ever see!

BLUE-GUM. I has to be.

BOLL-WEEVIL. Whyn't you tell me yo' plans befo'?

BLUE-GUM. Listen heah, Boll-Weevil, it don' do to talk too much an' too soon. Put dat in yo' hollow toof an' think on it. Now le's lie quiet an' rest. You's 'bout winded anyhow.

BOLL-WEEVIL. I is dat. Lawd, dat was some

race we put up. My legs is scratched to a frazzle, an' my insides is a-far foh water.

BLUE-GUM. Never mind yo' troubles. Shet up an' git yo' stren'th back. You ain't had no race a-tall lak whut you's gwine have.

BOLL-WEEVIL. Blue-Gum, you'll des' have to slow down on de next run. I's lot older an' stouter'n you is, an' my wind's short.

BLUE-GUM. (*Stretched out with his head on his arm*) Pipe down, nigger, an' cool yo' tongue. (*They both are silent. BOLL-WEEVIL arranges his head more comfortably on the satchel. By this time the shadows have deepened in the room. The thrushes have ceased calling, and only the wind is heard, with now and then the hoot of an owl. Presently BOLL-WEEVIL calls out in a tired voice.*)

BOLL-WEEVIL. Blue-Gum, if I gits so I cain't go fas' on de next lap, you'll stay by me, won't you?

BLUE-GUM. Whut's eatin' you? Sho' I'll stay by you. Ain't we pardners?

BOLL-WEEVIL. Yeh, yeh, we is. I's yo' buddy in dis, an' you's mine—huh?

BLUE-GUM. We is to de jumpin' off place. You lay and take a li'l snooze ef you wishes it. I's a reg'lar night-hawk foh watchin' an' listenin'.

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Sleepily*) Sho' is a good thing I gut you wid me.

BLUE-GUM. Yeh—be easy—be easy. (*A moment passes and BOLL-WEEVIL begins to snore. BLUE-GUM cautiously raises his head and listens. He calls softly*) Boll-Weevil! Boll-Weevil! (*As BOLL-WEEVIL makes no reply, he stands up, muttering to himself*) Dat fool is a hindrance an' a drag on me. 'Spicious, too, worse'n a ol' woman. (*He pulls a long knife from his belt.*) Why I ever git in wid him! Dunno how to use his haid mo'n a clay root . . . Boll-Weevil! (*There is no answer. The window slams shut with a bang.*) Gawd!

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Springing up*) Whut's dat! Uh-hunh, I sees you wid dat knife out, Blue-Gum? Whut'n de name o' God you doin'!

BLUE-GUM. (*Suddenly turning towards him*) S-ss-h! You crazy! I heahd a racket an' gut out my knife to see whut 'twas. 'Twon't nothin' but de wind shettin' de window. See? (*He points to the closed window.*)

BOLL-WEEVIL. Le's leave dis place! Le's git out!

BLUE-GUM. (*Pricking up his ears and grasping BOLL-WEEVIL suddenly by the arm.*) Hush! hush! I heah somethin' sho' 'nough now. (*He runs to the door and stands listening. Then he hurries back.*) Listen, you heah somethin'? (*BOLL-WEEVIL listens. A halloo comes from the swamp.*)

BOLL-WEEVIL. Lawd, dat's de officers! Dey's on our trail!

BLUE-GUM. Listen again. You don' heah no bloodhoun's, does you?

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Listening*) - Not yit. But le's clear out o' heah right now.

BLUE-GUM. Not on yo' life. 'Tain't dark enough yit, I tell you. You'd run right in deir arms in dat swamp. (*Voices are heard nearer.*)

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Breathlessly*) Dey's comin' to-wa'ds dis house!

BLUE-GUM. (*With a show of bravery*) Quiet yo'se'f. Breave easy. Crawl under dat bed in de corner.

BOLL-WEEVIL. I's 'fraid o' snakes under dere.

BLUE-GUM. Git under. Hurry. (*He crawls under, with the satchel still in his hand.*) I'll lie behind dis mess o' willows. (*He secretes himself in the shadows. In a moment the SHERIFF, a big burly white man, heavily armed, appears at the door and looks in. Behind him is a small thin man, his DEPUTY, armed also.*)

DEPUTY. Lonesome looking place, all right.

SHERIFF. Don't see why you wanted to come by here for. Waste of time. Them niggers is ten miles off by now.

DEPUTY. I dunno, you never can tell. Want to go in?

SHERIFF. (*Somewhat shakily*) No use, I guess. You couldn't drag a nigger to this part of the swamp with a two-horse team.

DEPUTY. You say though that Blue-Gum Ed is purty keen.

SHERIFF. He's purty keen. But he's like all niggers, afraid of witches and such.

DEPUTY. Believe I'll look around just a bit.

SHERIFF. I wouldn't go in there—no use, I say. We'd better hurry on and catch up with the crowd. Them two negroes is headed straight for Fayetteville this minute. I've wired the Sheriff there to keep a strict watch over the negro section.

DEPUTY. Wait for me while I look in and see what this old witch place is like. (*He pulls out his pistol and steps over the sill. The SHERIFF remains at the door with pistol drawn.*) Here's a pot on the floor—what's that for?

SHERIFF. (*Poking his head in*) They say old Aunt Mahaly used to have that in her witch business.

DEPUTY. Gosh, and here hangs one of her dresses on a nail. Phew! Everything growed up. And, say, here's a bed. Looks like a fine place for highland mocassins and all sorts of snakes. It sure is ha'nted, if any place in this world ever was.

SHERIFF. I hear some of the boys hallooing down the creek. Maybe they've struck a trail.

DEPUTY. (*Suddenly shouting*) Heigh, you two niggers, come out of here! (*A drum of wings follows as some birds fly out through the door.*)

SHERIFF. (*Jumping back*) Help! (*He fires his pistol twice in the air.*)

DEPUTY. (*Running to the door*) Where are they! What'd you shoot!

SHERIFF. (*Weakly*) Something went past me with a whiz—and I took a couple of cracks at it.

DEPUTY. (*Quietly*) That was nothing but birds I shoosed out of there.

SHERIFF. (*Mopping his forehead*) Mebbe so, but it might have been ol' Nick hisself from the racket they made.

DEPUTY. (*Looking back over the room*) I guess you're right, they didn't come by here. Got a flashlight?

SHERIFF. No, I haven't.

DEPUTY. I'm going to borrow somebody's soon as I get up with the fellows. Trailing a nigger in the dusk like this you need a light to watch for tracks.

SHERIFF. Let's go. If the boys should come on 'em while we're away, nothing in God's world could stop a lynching—after that bloody murder!

DEPUTY. All right. (*They go out and are heard talking as they disappear down the slope. BLUE-GUM runs to the door and watches a moment; then he comes back and sits down in the chair.*)

BLUE-GUM. Lawd, I don't lak dat depity! (*He looks at his watch.*) Heigh, Boll-Weevil, come out, you'n me's gut to be leavin' heah soon. (*BOLL-WEEVIL suddenly sets up a kicking and thundering under the bed.*) Whut's de trouble? (*BOLL-WEEVIL rolls out from under the bed, and begins slapping his trousers, his eyes turning in fear.*) You havin' a fit, man? (*He clutches his trousers to him, runs his hand down and lifts out a wriggling lizard.*) Hee-hee, I thought you was in a nest of rattlesnakes.

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Throwing the lizard against the wall and sitting on the floor panting*) Lawd, I thought I was a gone sucker. Dat rascal crawled up my britches whiles de Sheriff was a-cropin' in dis

room. (BLUE-GUM *starts towards the bed.* BOLL-WEEVIL *like a streak slides under and back out with the satchel.*) Oh, no, nigger, I totes de satchel yit a-while.

BLUE-GUM. (*Shaking his head*) Min' how you crosses me, I tells you. (*He goes and lies down on the floor back of the willow clump.*)

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Sitting down in the chair, and holding the satchel in his lap*) I ain't gwine cross you no mo'n I has to. But we ain't splittin' up till we gits out o' dis trouble togedder. How I know you won't gimme de highball soon's you git yo' half?

BLUE-GUM. I done gi'n you my word of honor.

BOLL-WEEVIL. Word of honor! Whut you doin' standin' up wid yo' knife a while ago?

BLUE-GUM. You is des' a fool from in to out. I tol' you I was listenin' foh somethin'! An' didn't dem officers come immejetly?

BOLL-WEEVIL. Mebbe so, mebbe so. (*He sits pondering.*)

BLUE-GUM. (*Trying to change the subject*) Ain't dat a Sheriff adder yo' heart! De fat head. He couldn't ketch de itch, no lessen me! He's des' too skeered. (*Apprehensively*) But I don' lak dat li'l man.

BOLL-WEEVIL. Me nuther. (*He begins feeling among the pile of firewood.* BLUE-GUM *watches him carefully. Finally he selects a club and holds it in his hand.*)

BLUE-GUM. (*Somewhat uneasily*) Whut you doin' wid dat piece o' wood?

BOLL-WEEVIL. Nothin'. I ain't gut no knife an' thought I'd better be prepared to die fightin' ef dem officers comes back.

BLUE-GUM. (*Eyering him straightly*) Uh-huh. (BOLL-WEEVIL *shivers.*) Whut you shilly-shakin' foh—cold?

BOLL-WEEVIL. Yeh. I run so fas' an' gut so hot. I's cold now since I cooled off.

BLUE-GUM. (*Sitting up*) You's skeahed, ain't you?

BOLL-WEEVIL. No, I ain't skeahed. But I wants to git out o' dis house, I do. Even dat Sheriff was a-feared to come in heah. Ain't no good gwine come of us stayin'—— (*His eyes roam around the room.*) Look yonder—whut's dat?

BLUE-GUM. (*Turning*) What?

BOLL-WEEVIL. Up above dat do!

BLUE-GUM. (*Standing up*) Oh, dat's a pair o' hawns Aunt Mahaly used to have when dey was a witch man helpin' her, so dey said. He'd put dem hawns on an' go th'ought de country at night layin' spells on peole. (*He sits down again and speaks nervously*) Heah, you quit looking foh dem quair things. 'Twon't do nuther of us no good. Why de devil you shake so?

BOLL-WEEVIL. I cain't he'p it, I tol' you. I's col'.

BLUE-GUM. (*Roughly*) Yeh, an' you's gwine be colder'n you is if you don' min' out.

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Straining forward*) Whut you mean by dat?

BLUE-GUM. Neveh min'. You'll see. I done tol' you to rest an' git yo' wind back. An' heah you is shiverin' an' shakin', skeahed to de'f oveh bein' in a ha'nted house. How you gwine rest if yo' min' don' rest?

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Mournfully*) I's a-feahed I's gut reason to shiver.

BLUE-GUM. Reason! You wouldn't ef you had any sense. De ol' woman's been daid twelve long yeah. She cain't hurt you.

BOLL-WEEVIL. How you know? Some of 'em says yo' pap was brought to his de'f by her long adder she was dead 'cause he crossed her in her ways.

BLUE-GUM. All bull, every bit. Pap died natchel.

I heard him say dat onct he stuck a redhot farstick into some milk dat ol' Aunt Mahaly had bewitched. An' when she died heah in dis house, dey foun' all de meat burnt away from her breast bone, an' dey 'lowed she'd come to git him. May be somethin' in it, may not be. Ain't nothin' quair in his dyin' sudden, dough. 'Pose yo' min' an' shet out sich thoughts.

BOLL-WEEVIL. She mought a had somethin' to do wid it adder all.

BLUE-GUM. Why'n de hell don't you lie down an' die ef you's skeahed to de'f!

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*After a pause*) You talks mighty rough. Is we still pardners?

BLUE-GUM. Sho' God is. Why you ax dat?

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Wretchedly*) I des' axed.

BLUE-GUM. (*Leaning his head on his hand*) Hope you's satisfied?

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Turning towards him, vehemently*) Blue-Gum Ed, you knows why I's shakin' an' skeahed out'n my skin.

BLUE-GUM. (*Feigning surprise*) Me? No suh.

BOLL-WEEVIL. You knows dat dey's somethin' else I's skeahed of mo'n I is de ol' woman.

BLUE-GUM. Lawd, whut kin it be?

BOLL-WEEVIL. You knows what I mean, don't you?

BLUE-GUM. I ain't gut no idee.

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Almost sobbing*) Yeh, you has; yeh, you has.

BLUE-GUM. Well, tell me den, so I'll know whut to do.

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Looking at him piteously*) It's you, Blue-Gum, you I's skeahd of an' you knows it.

BLUE-GUM. (*Still lying sprawled out*) Me? (*Softly*) You hain't gut no reason to be a-feahd o' me, Boll-Weevil.

BOLL-WEEVIL. Don't try to hoss me now, boy. I

seed you when you come steppin' over heah wid yo' knife drawed 'while ago. An' I was gittin' ready to down you wid a stick o' wood.

BLUE-GUM. (*Jumping up*) You damn worm, whut you mean? (*He reaches for his knife.*)

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Springing out of his chair and gripping his piece of wood*) I know whut's in yo' min'! An' you knows I ain't gut no knife. I was makin' out I was 'sleep to see whut you'd do.

BLUE-GUM. (*Subsiding and covering his surprise*) For crap's sake, stop dat yowlin'! You want dat depity comin' heah ag'in?

BOLL-WEEVIL. I wants to know whut you'n me's gwine do.

BLUE-GUM. *Do?* We's gwine make tracks in about five minutes.

BOLL-WEEVIL. I dunno—mebbe not.

BLUE-GUM. Hunh! Why not?

BOLL-WEEVIL. Listen to me, nigger. I's done gut onto yo' game. Whut proof I gut you won't stob me in de back when we gits out in dat swamp an' take all de money an' scoot? Tell me dat.

BLUE-GUM. (*Looking at him in feigned astonishment*) You's crazy in de haid.

BOLL-WEEVIL. I ain't nuther. I seed you 'while ago, an' I heahd you say I been a drag on you.

BLUE-GUM. (*Shrugging his shoulders*) I was des' talkin'.

BOLL-WEEVIL. I ain't a complete fool by no means. An' I ain' gwine step out th'ough dat do' till you th'ows away dat knife, so we kin start even.

BLUE-GUM. Th'ow my knife away! Whut we do in a tight!

BOLL-WEEVIL. You said we won't gwine git in no tight—all easy sailin'. No suh, I ain't riskin' it a step. If you wants to go on an' leave all de cash wid me, go ahead. But I ain't budgin' an' givin' up a cent of it till you gits rid o' dat knife.

BLUE-GUM. (*Making a step towards him, his eyes shining*) You—you chinchy dog, whut's to hinder my cuttin' yo' th'oot dis minnit?

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Backing away and whining*) Don't come towa'ds me lookin' lak dat.

BLUE-GUM. (*Pulling his knife*) You know whut I's gwine do foh you? Des' dis—strangle yo' guts out an' take dat money an' git away. You 'spicious devil!

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Moving farther away from him and holding his club in readiness*) We's buddies, Blue-Gum! (*Swallowing and choking with fear*) Foh God's sake, don' come at me wid dat knife.

BLUE-GUM. (*Half-snarling*) We ain' buddies nor nothin' to each other. I's on to yo' game, yes suh. You huntin' a piece o' wood to brad my haid wid. Well, stid o' you brainin' me an' gittin' it all, I's cuttin' yo' th'oot an' gittin' it all. Won't be no halves.

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Licking his lips*) You come one step mo' an' I'll yell so loud dem officers'll come a-runnin'.

BLUE-GUM. Do you no good. Dey's clean out'n heahin'.

BOLL-WEEVIL. (*Casting the satchel behind him and taking his club in both hands*) Aw right, nigger, come on me den, an' yo' brains'll be smeared all over dis stick o' wood. (*They stand watching each other.*) I axes you now ef you wants yo' ha'f o' dat money.

BLUE-GUM. Ha'f! I wants it all an' I's gwine have it all.

BOLL-WEEVIL. Not long as dis light'ood knot holds out. (*They stand calculating. BOLL-WEEVIL suddenly cries out*) Look, foh God's sake, at dat do' a-shettin'! (*With a start of fear BLUE-GUM turns his head. As he does so, BOLL-WEEVIL springs forward quick as a cat, and brings his club crashing*

down on his head. *With a deep groan, BLUE-GUM sinks to his knees. BOLL-WEEVIL searches in the corner and picks up the satchel.*) Now see who's boss o' de proceedin's. Thank you very much foh de plans to git away. *(BLUE-GUM sinks forward on his elbows and knees.)* I'd leave a li'l o' dis kale to bury you wid ef I had time. But I's in a hurry. So long, an' maybe ef you an' de debil ever puts on a scrape o' robbin' in hell, you won't be so greedy. *(He looks around him. The door suddenly closes.)* Dark in heah aw right! Lawd, how come dat do' shet? Nothin' but de win'. Whar's dat do'? Heah she is. *(As his fingers feel the cracks)* Heah's onct I makes a clean haul. *(He turns and calls)* Blue-Gum! Blue-Gum! Guess I put his lights out aw right. *(He pulls at the door.)* Whut ails dis damn do'! Mus' be stuck. *(Unseen by him, BLUE-GUM rises to his feet, draws his knife, and springs forward. BOLL-WEEVIL hears him.)* Whut's dat? *(He turns and sees BLUE-GUM upon him. His scream gurgles in his throat as the knife almost severs his head from his shoulders. His body falls in a heap on the ground.)*

BLUE-GUM. *(Gnashing his teeth)* Now—now—you scrush my haid wid a knot an' I cut yo' damn th'roat! *(He rocks his head in pain.)* Lawd, dat nigger 'bout done foh me. *(Exultantly)* De money's all mine now. Nigger, you is fixed foh life. Rich! No mo' hidin' in de swamps an' jookin' th'ough de shadows. You goes norf an' rides wid de best. *(He feels on the floor and gets the satchel.)* Heah she is, heavy, too. No wonder dat li'l fool didn't want me to git my han's on it. How my haid hurts! *(He puts his hand to it.)* Mercy! My face is civered wid blood. An' everythin' is dizzy lak. *(In a sudden rage he kicks BOLL-WEEVIL's body.)* You—you damn dirty thief, to kill me when I won't lookin'. *(He spits at the body, then dropping the*

satchel, he seizes it, lifts it in his hands, and throws it crashing into the briars and creepers at the left front.) I could cut you into sa'sage meat. (*Feeling in his belt*) Heah, heah, I's lost my knife. (*He feels on the floor. Failing to find it, he stands up.*) Lemme think. I cain't 'member, my haid th'obs so. Yeh, yeh, it mus' still be stickin' in Boll-Weevil's neck. (*Shuddering*) Ugh, I don' lak de job of gittin' it out now. But I cain't go off wid nothin' to 'tect me. Git on, git on, don' be 'fraid. (*He urges himself over to BOLL-WEEVIL'S body and feels for his knife.*) Ugh, he's all wet from his shoulders down.

(*While he is searching, a glow begins to rise under the old pot. It grows and gradually lights up the room. BLUE-GUM draws back suddenly from the body.*) Ooh! his haid's des' hangin' by a piece o' bone. I sho' gi'n him a rake. But I was mad, mad! Seems lak dey's a light from somewhah. (*He turns and sees the fire mounting around the pot. With a choking cry, he springs behind the willow clump and stands trembling. In a throaty whisper he talks to himself*) Now whut kin dat mean! Huh, is I crazy? Sho' cain't be nothin', but dat lick I gut on de haid makes me see red fi' lak dat. Dat's all. (*With a trembling hand he pulls out his watch.*) Time I was leavin' heah. (*He peers through the willows.*) Golly, dey's steam risin' out o' dat pot. Mus' be r'al fiah. (*He puts his hand to his head. Blood is trickling down his face from a gash across his forehead. He feels it gingerly.*) Lawd, I's hurt bad! (*He looks again through the willows.*) Who built dat fi', I want to know? Hain't been nobody in heah to do dat. (*With sudden terror*) Ha'nts! De ol' woman's mixed up in it somehow! (*His voice in a whine*) I gut to git away from heah quick. (*He creeps to the extreme right of the room and then by the bed to the door, keeping his eyes all the time on*

the fire. Picking up the satchel he rushes to the door.) Dat's quair! She won't open. Pull harder. *(He sets the satchel down and puts his fingers in the crack of the door, pulling again and again. He wipes the sweat and blood from his face.)* Some-thin' wrong. Try ag'in, I gut to leave heah.

(As he is straining at the door, a great black dog rises up out of the shadow at the left rear of the room, comes near BLUE-GUM and begins licking up the blood on the floor. He has an enormous mouth and fiery eyes that always look straight before him.)

(BLUE-GUM backs away from the door and runs against it with all his might. Then he grabs his head in both hands, shaking himself in pain.) My po' haid, my po' haid. Too much of a jar! I gut to have a log or somethin' an' break down dat do'. *(He turns to look for a heavy timber and sees the dog. With a shout he flies behind the clump of willows, and stands shaking as if with an ague. The dog then goes and sits on his haunches to the left of the door, his great red tongue hangingly motionlessly from his jaws and his eyes staring straight before him. BLUE-GUM stands twisting his hands together. After a moment he gets up courage to peep through the willows.)* Dere he sets by dat do' to keep me from gwine out. Whut is he—bloodhoun'? Ain' no r'al dog, I 'spects. *(Pondering a moment.)* Seems lak I 'member heahin Pap say people'd meet a dog lak dat roun' graveyards. Ugh! dat ain't no dog. God a'mighty, dat's a ha'nt. *(He crouches down on his knees.)* Whah's my knife! *(He feels in his pockets, in his belt.)* Gone—lost. Yeh, I 'member, she's lost. *(He looks around at the pile of wood and reaches to pull three or four sticks towards him. He holds a heavy one in his hand and seems to draw comfort from feeling it.)* I reckons ef dat black

devil 'tacks me, he's gwine git de hardest tussle he ever had. (*Almost moaning*) Oh, if I on'y had my knife! (*He raises his head and looks over the room again and cries out almost jubilantly as he spies it lying a few feet from the dog.*) Yonder she is! (*He makes a move to get it and stops.*) No, I cain't face dat dog—wait'll he moves. (*He sits down again, shaking his head and rocking to and fro.*)

(*While he is doing this, a little girl dressed in white with long yellow hair rises up from the brambles and vines at the left and comes out into the center of the room, all the time keeping her face towards the rear. BLUE-GUM looks at his watch.*) Nigger, time you was leavin' dis burg, I tells you. I's gwine git th'ough dat do' somehow. No other way, I'll clamb up to de rafters an' bust my way th'ough de house top! Mus' be rotten by dis time. (*He staggers to his feet and sees the little girl. Gasping*) Whah'd dat li'l gal come from! (*He watches her with fascinated eyes as she walks forward and picks up the knife and drops it in the pot. Then she walks backwards to the chair and sits down with her face averted from BLUE-GUM.*) Dere goes de last o' my knife. (*He looks at her perplexedly. Something like joy comes into his voice.*) Things is lookin' better foh me. Dat's a sho' 'nough li'l white gal. I b'lieves she is. Quair how she gut in, dough. I know, she's lost an' come heah tryin' to fin' her mammy. I'll ax her how come she's heah. An' mebbe I'll take her wid me an' have her sent back to her home. Her folks'll sho' be glad. (*He addresses her in a gentle voice*) Say, li'l gal, whut you doin' in dis ol' house?—She don't heah me! (*Suddenly afraid.*) Mebbe dey's somethin' quair 'bout her, too. I didn't lak de way she put dat knife in de pot an' den walk back'ards to dat chur. (*He calls again*) Is you lost, li'l gal, an' cain't fin' yo' mammy? (*She makes no reply.*) Is you a fur ways f'om de place

whah you lives? (*He watches her anxiously.*) I cain't make out why she don' say nothin'. Is she lak dat dog—cain't speak? (*Eyeing her closely*) Sho' she ain't no ha'nt. Look at her li'l han' hangin' by her side, des' as purty as any li'l baby's—flesh an' blood she is. Wish I could see her face dough. (*Shaking his head mournfully*) Don' know whut to make o' all dis. I's gwine git closer an' git her to speak to me. (*Suddenly jerking his head up*) Lawd, I's hear'n tell o' people goin' th'ough swamps an' meetin' a li'l gal in de road an' she leadin' 'em into de quagmars an' leavin' 'em to die. (*Catching his breath*) Ooh! she ain't gwine lead me into no place to drown. Nigger, heah's whah you lights a rag. I's gwine out o' dis house. (*He grasps a log, preparatory to climbing up to the rafters.*)

(*The little girl turns toward him. She has neither ears, eyes, nose, nor mouth. BLUE-GUM takes his hand from the log.*) Golly, 'bout to leave my satchel. Dat'll never do. (*He looks longingly towards the door where it sits close to the dog.*) Cain't tempt dat dog wid nothin' in my han'. Git me a stick an' I'll have dat satchel. Take mo'n harmless ha'nts to git de best o' me. (*He turns towards the pile of firewood and sees the little girl facing him. His eyes almost start from his head and he clutches at his throat as if stifling. He yells*) Turn yo' haid away! Turn yo' haid away! God ha' muhcy, she ain't gut no face! (*He puts his arm over his eyes to shield him from the sight. The little girl turns and faces towards the rear. After a moment, BLUE-GUM dares to raise his eyes. He breathes with great relief when he sees she has turned away. Weakly he sits down on the ground, wipes his face, and rocks back and forth.*) Oh, whut's to happen to me!

(*Out of the right corner near the bed rises JACK-MUH-LANTERN, a creature about four or five*

feet high, part boy and part dog. His body is hairy like a dog, he leaps like a grasshopper, and his face is terrible to look upon—thick sausage lips open from ear to ear, great goggle eyes, and a beard that sticks sharply down from his chin. He takes his place to the right of the door.)

(BLUE-GUM rouses himself out of his moaning and rocking.) I tells you, nigger, we mus' be leavin' out'n heah. You'll have flesh an' blood ha'nts to deal wid in another hour. *(He picks up a stick.)* Dog or no dog I's gwine git my li'l satchel, an' beat it. *(He taps the stick softly against the ground.)* Des' hold yo' nerve an' be steady. *(He looks up at the rafters.)* Th'ee jumps an' you is out th'ough de roof. *(Shaking his head)* Dat dog's whut gits my goat. Ef he'd des' shet his eyes or pull in his tongue or somethin'. But he sets an' des' sets. *(With sudden resolve)* Whut'n de devil you git groanin' an' moanin' over it! Ef dey is ha'nts you's gut to stand 'em. *(He gets up and grips his club.)* Heah goes. Fightin' is better'n givin' up an' dyin'. If dats a sho' 'nough dog an' tries to stop me from gittin' away wid my money, he's gwine call for de calf rope an' he'p to git dis chunk o' wood out'n his th'oat. *(He turns quickly and takes a step forward, then stops as if paralyzed at the sight of JACK-MUH-LANTERN. The piece of wood falls to the ground. He drops to his knees with a sob, wringing his hands. Then he cries out)* Who is you, standin' dere grinnin'? Speak to me! Is you de devil come to carry me off? *(He suddenly turns his back and sits panting for breath.)* Lawd, I cain't look at dat sight no mo'. *(He lifts up his hands and pleads)* Jesus, help me, save me! Keep dat grinnin' critter from me. *(Moaning)* Oh, somebody he'p me. Heah I is shet in wid ha'nts an' cain't git away. *(He bends over and leans his head on the ground, pulling his hair.*

Presently he grows calmer and sits up.) Dese heah is ha'nts. Ain't no doubt of it. Dat last one—I knows him. I seed him one night on de road to Dunn. Dat's Jack-muh-Lantern. I knows every one of 'em. Now, so fur, so good. An' nigger, you needn't call for help. You gut to help yo'self. Use yo' haid, work yo' brains, I tells you. I knows whut dese ha'nts does. An' ef I keeps up a strong backbone dey cain't make me do nothin' I don' want to. *(Questioningly)* Now, I dunno 'bout dat. Mought be so ef I had a charm, mole foot or rabbit foot or somethin' *(Disgustedly)* Listen at him! 'Cose dey ain't no power in sech.

(During his talk RAW-HEAD-AND-BLOODY-BONES rises up in the left rear and stands between the dog and the left wall. He is a tall specter with a raw, hairless head, dressed in a loose flowing garment. His hands and feet are long, bony and bloody. His eyes and mouth are closed.)

(Not sceeing him, BLUE-GUM goes on with his talk) Dis much is certain. Ef I's to git away 'fo' dem blood houn's gits on my trail and chews me into flinders, I better be stirrin'. I cain't git out de do', it seems. I's sho' I kin make it th'ough de roof. But I cain't go off an' leave my money. Den—all to be done is to git dat satchel. An', 'y God, I's gwine git it. *(He grasps the club and turns around. A gasp breaks from him as he sees RAW-HEAD standing to the left of the dog. His knees almost sag to the floor.)* Uh-huh, another one! Every time I turns my back, one of you comes. I knows you, ol' Raw-Head-and-Bloody-Bones. *(Moistening his lips)* Hold yo' peace, I ain't gwine bother you. Yeh, lak all de rest, you don' say nothin'. Whut you all doin' heah so silent lak? *(While he is keeping up this rapid talk, he is cunningly slipping towards his*

satchel sitting between the dog and JACK-MUH-LANTERN.) Yeh, you all think you'll come heah an' skeah a po' nigger to de'f, don' you? Well, you's gut yo' han's full. You all sees me wid my haid laid wide open, ain't it so? Well, look over in de fur corner an' you'll fin' de body of him whut done it.

(Behind him near the willow bushes the IRON-FACED-MAN rises and waits with arms folded across his breast. His uniform is that of a Yankee soldier, without a cap. His head and face are the color of bronze or dull iron.)

(BLUE-GUM moves nearer to his satchel, talking all the while as if fear were unknown to him, although his eyes are rolling in terror.) Yessuh, over in de corner you'll find de fool whut tried to kill me in de dark. You ha'nts wouldn't harm a po' nigger, would you? 'Co'se you wouldn't. You's des' heah on yo' own business. I ain't never gwine tell nobody whut I seed. Go right on ha'ntin' folkses, I ain't never gwine stop you. No-suh! *(He suddenly darts down and snatches the satchel from the floor and backs away from them. He shouts joyfully)* Hooray, dey's harmless, dey didn't even bother me! *(Sharply)* Shet yo' damn fuss box, nigger. You tell de whole worl' you's heah in dis swamp. Now, to clamb to de top. *(He looks up, searching a place to break through the roof.)* Dere's a good place above de bed. Looks rotten dere. You's des' in time, my boy. Ef you'd a-waited much longer, you'd been cotched. Tomorrow you sleeps in Liza's house, hee! hee! Lemme back back, an' git a runnin' start an' I goes up lak a squirrel. *(Looking at satchel.)* No, I gut to have bofe han's free. *(Calculating the distance.)* Lemme see. I know, I'll buckle dis li'l money safe to my belt. *(Suddenly springing up in*

the air.) Lawd God, whah dat fi'ry breaf come from? *(He turns, sees the IRON-FACED-MAN standing stolidly before him.)* Ugh—who's you! *(He rubs the back of his neck with a trembling hand and whines)* Don' you breave on me no mo'. Oh, don' you move. Hah, I knows you, I knows you, I'on-Face-Man. *(Laughs weakly)* Hee-hee. I's de only man whut's ever felt yo' breaf an' lived. *(His voice rising high)* Yeh, yeh, I cain't be killed, dat's it. I's dea'f-proof. *(Pondering)* Didn't dat low-down Boll-Weevil try to spill my brains? Didn't do it. No, couldn't, dat's it. Den dat—dog come to skeer me to deaf. Couldn't do it. *(Laughing wildly)* No, suh. An' den each of you ghostes come to finish de job. *(Boldly)* But you couldn't do it. I's too much man foh you. You cain't skeah me. I's lak de cat whut cain't be killed. Take heart, nigger, take heart, you's gwine make it yit. Now lemme fix dis satchel to my waist an' out I goes. *(He undoes his belt and passes it through the handle and buckles it.)*

(While he is thus employed, the MOONACK, an old thin beardless man in a long nightshirt, carrying a walking-stick, eyes set in a deathly stare, his white hair rising like writhing worms above his forehead, a frothy substance on his lips, comes up out of the shadows at the right and stands between JACK-MUH-LANTERN and the IRON-FACED-MAN.)

(BLUE-GUM finishes fastening his satchel.) Ef any o' you thinks you'll stop me now, you's mistaken a mighty damn sight. Heah I goes. *(He sees the old man. Blubbering)* Anudder one still. Whah you come from, daid man? *(Drawing back before his stare.)* Look at dem eyes! *(Terrified)* Yeh, Lawd in heaben, he's come f'om de grave. He ain't

lak dem udder ghostes. I sees de purgin' on his lips. Make way, make way, I's gwine rise an' fly. (*With a bound he is on the bed, and stepping on the edge of it, he springs up, but the satchel hangs between him and the wall, hindering his movements. He clings to a log and pants*) How come I so heavy, cain't lift myself up. Dat damn satchel in de way. Christ, I's slipping back. (*His hands slip from the wall and he crashes down among the briars and debris of the bed. He stands up.*) I ain't hurt, des' jarred a bit. (*He springs out of the bed and lunges against the door, then claws at it. Moaning*) Cain't make it dere. I know. I'll git rid o' dis hindrance. (*He unbuckles the satchel.*) I'll put dat long green in my shirt, den nothin' to git in de way. (*He takes the satchel from his waist and buckles his belt tightly about him.*) Whyn't I think o' dat befo'? (*He opens the satchel and with eager hands pulls out a package wrapped in loose brown paper.*) She's heavy, must be lot o' gol' an' silver in it, too. (*He undoes the package and holds up a brick. His eyes almost start from his head.*) Whut's dis, whut's dis! (*He seizes the satchel and feels in it, then throws it from him. Screaming*) Dat Boll-Weevil robbed me! (*Crying out in a loud voice*) Whah's my money! whah's my money! He's tuk it an' hid it! (*Seizing the brick.*) Gimme back my money, damn you, or I'll beat you into sass. (*He springs across the room and towers above the dead BOLL-WEEVIL, holding the brick high above him.*) Spit out, spit out, whah is she? (*Lowering his arm*) He cain't answer you, nigger. He's daid, daid as a do' nail. (*Sobbing*) Oh, you li'l devil! whyn't I look in dat bag 'fo' I cut yo' haid off? (*He hurls the brick against the lifeless body and stands beaten and helpless in the middle of the room. Then he falls down on the pile of firewood, moaning and beating his forehead with his fist. He lays hold of*

a small stick of wood and sits thinking. Suddenly he springs up, brandishing the stick.) Dat li'l v'lise was conjured. 'Twan't Boll-Weevil done it, 'twas dem ha'nts. (*Glaring at the motionless specters.*) Gi'me back my money! (*Threateningly*) You's gut it hid somewhahs, better tell me, better tell me! (*They eye him silently.*) Don't move; uh? 'Y God, I'll churn you into butter. (*He moves towards them.*) Talk to me, cough up dat dough! (*With a yell he springs forward, and whirling his stick above his head, brings it down on the IRON-FACED-MAN. It passes through him as if he were smoke, and he fades away. Jubilantly*) I tol' you I'd smash you up. One gone. (*He strikes at the MOONACK, who also disappears in the shadows at the right.*) Two of 'em. (*He rushes from one to the other, fighting and cursing. In a moment he stands alone in the room, panting and wiping his face.*) I reckon I gut de best o' dem devils. Dat's somethin' foh one nigger to do. Now I clamps out th'ough de roof. (*Looking around on the floor.*) But I cain't leave my money. It's heah somewhah in dis room. I'll find it. (*Looking at the fire around the pot.*) Dat fi' burn cu'ious. I'll smash dat pot! (*He starts forward with his stick raised, then stops.*) I gut to have light to look foh dat bundle o' greenbacks. I'll put out de fi' when I gits my kale. (*He falls on his knees and begins crawling among the vines and brambles, all the while talking to himself.*) Rise, dollars, show yo'self. You's boun' to be heah. (*While he is searching, a little old ragged Negro woman, wearing a slat-bonnet pulled down over her face, appears in the room and begins stirring the pot. She stops stirring and raises her fleshless hands above her head in an incantation. As she brings them down, a low rumble of thunder sounds in the distance. BLUE-GUM raises his head and listens.*) Ha, thunder! Dat's good. Come a big rain an' I's

safe from de bloodhoun's. (*He turns again to his searching, and the old woman resumes her stirring. After a moment she raises her hands again. A louder rumble of thunder sounds in answer to her summons.*) Sho' is a storm rising aw right. Hot enough foh somethin'. Whah's dat money? (*He wriggles among the briars and shrubs. The wind moans in the trees outside. BLUE-GUM scratches in the bushes and overturns pieces of plank.*) Dat win' do soun' lak lost speerits cryin'. (*The old woman raises her hands again, and a louder roll of thunder responds.*) Dat storm comin' nigher, thank God! I'll take it easy, mebbe stay heah till day or git dat money back. (*Sitting on his haunches and thinking.*) Oh, I cain't think foh my po' haid. Lemme see. Dat satchel was opened whiles I won't lookin'. Dem ha'nts ain't flesh an' blood. Dey couldn't tuk it. Yessuh, dat Boll-Weevil slipped dat money out an' hid it heah, figur'n' to come back an' git it later. I'll fin' it, an' dey won't be no splittin' it up. (*He cautiously approaches BOLLWEEVIL'S body and rolls it over.*) Must be heah somewhah in dis corner, dat's whah he sot most of de time. Jesus, how his eyes shine, lak a stuck hog! (*The OLD WOMAN picks up the open satchel and fastens it to her belt.*) Thought I heard a jinglin' sound. (*He turns and gasps.*) Whah'd dat ol' 'oman come from? (*Standing up.*) Who's you? (*She makes no response and goes on with her stirring.*) What's she stirrin' in dat pot? (*Backing behind the willow clump.*) Dat dress an' bonnet's gone from de wall yonder. She's gut 'em on. (*Whining*) Aunt Mahaly, is dat you, come back to ha'nt po' Blue-Gum Ed? Is you? (*The only reply she makes is to raise her arms again above her head. This time there is a flash of lightning seen through the crack in the door, followed by a heavy crash of thunder. BLUE-GUM stands watching her breathlessly.*) Muhcy, her han's is nothin'

but white bone! Whut's she up to? Dat thunder an' lightnin' seem to be answerin' her or somethin'. (*She raises her hands. A nearer crash responds.*) God A'mighty, she's bringin' a storm down on dis house. (*The wind begins to roar.*) I cain't leave heah now, dat's a harrycane comin' th'ough de swamp. Whut kin I do! Whut kin I do! (*He raises his head.*) Whut's she doin' wid dat satchel? (*As if in answer to his question, she reaches into it and pulls out a frog by one leg and throws it into the pot.*) Aunt Mahaly! Aunt Mahaly! Oh, she's makin' her witch soup to destroy me wid! (*She pulls out a wriggling lizard and casts it into the pot and goes on stirring. The wind blows louder. He shivers and watches her with open mouth. She pulls out a snake and throws it into the pot. A crash of thunder jars the ground. He cries out*) Aunt Mahaly, don' put no mo' in dat pot. Don't destroy me wid thunder an' lightnin'! (*She throws a mole in. The storm increases. BLUE-GUM moans and rocks on the ground and a wild glazed look begins to creep into his eyes. He sits with his back to the old witch. She throws a rat in. He starts as if a pain had caught him. His tongue hangs from his mouth, and he gasps for breath. The storm increases. He cries out in a high quavering voice*) Don't put dat spell on me, don't conjure me! (*He falls to sobbing. She pulls out several small bones and throws them in. BLUE-GUM squeals in pain, never once looking around. The wind and thunder gather in violence.*) Lawd have muhcy! Have muhcy, Lawd. Save me! save me! (*She pulls out a dead man's hand, hairy and pale, and throws it in. He springs off the ground as if convulsed in unbearable pain. The storm grows louder, with thunder and lightning crashing among the trees. His voice rises into a scream*) He'p! he'p! she's witchin' me. She's puttin' a spell on me! (*He pitches forward on his face,*

his hand falling on the stick of wood. His fingers feel it, and gradually close around it. The OLD WOMAN stirs the pot and begins circling it. BLUE-GUM crawls to his knees, holding the stick in his hand. Slowly he staggers to his feet. His eyes are insane with hate and fear. He foams at the mouth. Laughing wildly, he starts towards her.) Hee-hee—I'll beat you into de dirt wid my stick. (As he comes across the floor, her face is turned towards him. He snarls) You's a skeletum. I sees you. Hee-hee!

(The GOBLINS rise again out of the shadows and stand around the room.

(A moment of enlightenment sets him crazy with fear and he springs like a cat to the right wall and begins climbing to the roof, all the time champing and foaming at the mouth like a wild animal. AUNT MAHALY makes a movement as if drawing a circle on the floor with her stick. She points towards BLUE-GUM, and as if struck by sudden paralysis, he falls with a thud to the floor, and rolls out into the circle.

(With a slow step that gradually increases in time, the GOBLINS begin to walk around his prostrate form, AUNT MAHALY going before and the procession ending with the LITTLE GIRL. At a movement of the OLD WOMAN'S stick, BLUE-GUM sits up. He begins mumbling and laughing as they go around him. The storm grows in intensity as the marchers increase their time, BLUE-GUM'S singing and mumbling, rising with it.

(A man dressed in a palm-beach suit, carrying a small satchel, joins the procession. A wide blood-stain spreads out from his heart downward. BLUE-GUM shouts out in a crazy slobbering voice.)

BLUE-GUM. Ain't you daid, white man, ain't you daid? Whah's my knife? He's gut money in dat satchel. *(With fascinated eyes he watches them going by him.)* Gimme my knife an' let n.e git to him. *(He makes a weak movement to rise and then falls back to the floor, clapping his hands in time with the marchers.)*

(BOLL-WEEVIL, with his head hanging on his shoulder and his throat cut wide across, comes out of the corner and begins marching behind the WHITE MAN. The marchers increase their pace, the storm grows louder, and BLUE-GUM's laughing and chanting rises shriller.)

BLUE-GUM. Hi-yee—hi-yee—hi-yee! Hee—hee—hee—Hi-yee—hi-yee—hi-yee! Hee—hee—hee!

(By this time the marchers are whirling by. Suddenly the GOBLINS stand still and AUNT MAHALY raises her hands. The room is filled with a blinding light and a terrific explosion. With a shriek, BLUE-GUM springs in the air and falls flat on his back, and lies still. The light dies away from the pot and the room is filled with darkness. The wind and storm die away.)

(Presently voices are heard outside. The door is pushed open and two figures are discerned, one holding a flash light. They are dripping wet.)

DEPUTY. That bolt of lightning struck near here. By Jees, that was a sudden storm!

SHERIFF. It's dying away now, no use going in. We're already wet.

DEPUTY. Let's git in from under them trees. A limb blow against us an' our tale'd be told. *(He steps into the room, turning his flash-light about.)* Heigh, looka here!

SHERIFF. What is it? (*The DEPUTY pulls his pistol and comes up to BLUE-GUM's body.*)

DEPUTY. Watch out, here lies Blue-Gum dead as a nit.

SHERIFF. (*Coming gingerly in*) What'n the devil!

DEPUTY. (*Turning his light about*) Here's something else. (*He discovers BOLL-WEEVIL's body.*) Boll-Weevil over here in the corner dead, too.

SHERIFF. (*With his pistol in his hand*) That's damn queer!

DEPUTY. (*Picking up the satchel*) Here's the money, thank God. (*He opens the satchel, and searches in it.*) Every dollar of it too, from the feel. (*His flash-light reveals a package of bills.*)

SHERIFF. (*Nervously*) Killed each other fighting over it, I bet. Let's get out and shoot a few times, and holler for the fellows. (*He runs out at the rear and fires his pistol off, yelling, "Hoo—ah!" Answering halloos sound far down in the swamp.*)

CURTAIN

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